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SUBJECT: MALIAN TUAREGS WILL REMAIN IN BURKINA FASO UNTIL GOBF
INVESTIGATIONS ON ASYLUM STATUS ARE COMPLETE

REF: A) OUAGADOUGOU 448; B) BAMAKO 648

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: As of late July, around 1,990 Malian Tuareg seeking refugee asylum were living at various locations around Burkina Faso, the majority of them in a refugee camp in Djibo, in Northern Burkina Faso. These asylum seekers are currently living off donations from local and international organizations including: the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the Red Cross, and the Government of Burkina Faso (GOBF). According to the director of the Burkina Faso National Commission for Refugees (CONAREF), they will remain in their respective camps until investigations on each asylum seeker are complete and the GOBF can decide who is entitled to stay.

[1](#)2. (U) The Malian Embassy here believes the asylum seekers had no reason to flee Mali, and that most were already living in Burkina Faso. Malian Embassy officials say they will assist Malians who wish to return home. End Summary.

CONAREF: Malian Tuaregs have Real Fear for Their Lives

[1](#)3. (SBU) CONAREF Director Der Kogda told PolOff on July 15 that approximately 1,990 Malians were now living in temporary quarters in Djibo and in other parts of the country. After visiting Djibo during the week of July 7 and conducting several interviews, Kodga said that many Malian Tuaregs currently residing in Djibo had fled Mali out of a real and founded fear for their lives. Kodga agreed that the Tuaregs were not the victims of current fighting in Mali, but believed firmly that they did not relocate to Burkina Faso for economic reasons. These refugees, Kodga explained, were previously living in Mali in areas with fighting on both sides of them and feared attacks from both military and civilian enemies. Having lived through GOM-Tuareg fighting in the early 1990s, these Tuaregs considered their movement into Burkina Faso to have been a necessary, precautionary measure (ref A). Kodga maintained his support of the Malians, and cited the poor conditions that they were currently living in. Kodga felt that the Tuaregs would not live in these conditions by choice, unless they felt they had no other choice.

[1](#)4. (SBU) According to CONAREF, none of the asylum seekers CONAREF interviewed intended to return home, indicating, in the GOBF's opinion, that the refugees faced a real and constant threat to their security in Mali. CONAREF maintains that there was a need for the refugees to stay in Burkina Faso for the time being despite the release by the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) of a report that found only about a dozen of the Malian Tuaregs were actually entitled to live under refugee status (ref B). CONAREF said they had not received a copy of the UNHCR report, but had heard that the UNHCR report criticized their office.

[1](#)5. (SBU) Kodga claimed that after giving UNHCR free-reign in Burkina Faso to conduct their assessment of the refugee situation, UNHCR had complained to the press that they had received no assistance from CONAREF. Kodga expressed his extreme dissatisfaction with UNHCR for the way they had changed their opinion about the Tuareg refugees. Kodga bemoaned that UNHCR had not asked for any assistance during

their visit to Burkina Faso. Kodga defended GOBF actions, saying that the Government was obliged to accept the Malians as refugees, at least until they were proven not to qualify for refugee status. Furthermore, the GOBF had done a great deal of work in managing the humanitarian needs associated with the refugees, including the creation of an inter-ministerial committee of government offices and local and international groups and NGOs.

Malian Embassy Denies Threat to Malian Tuaregs

¶6. (SBU) Malian Embassy Deputy Chief of Mission, Sekou Maiga, Maiga told PolOff on July 2 that, as far as the Government of Mali was concerned, the UNHCR and the GOBF were free to do what they thought was best to support the Malian population of displaced persons now living in Burkina Faso. From the Malian Government's perspective, these people were citizens of Mali who had not been endangered or forced from their homes in any way. Furthermore, their circumstances were in no way associated with the ongoing conflict in Mali. Maiga felt it was possible that these refugees were seeking asylum because they feared a repeat of violence against them such as occurred in the early 1990s (noted above), but found this reasoning difficult to justify. Maiga said that economic hardship was a more likely cause for the presence of Malian Tuaregs in Burkina Faso.

¶7. (SBU) According to Maiga, many of the Malian Tuaregs who presented themselves at the stadium in Ouagadougou have been in Burkina Faso for as many as 15 years. They are not displaced persons at all, he claimed. Maiga believed that many Malians who presented themselves as refugees in Ouagadougou were already living in Burkina Faso, possibly camped near the Mali-Burkina border near

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Djibo, and had received word from their fellow countrymen to come to Ouagadougou for assistance. Maiga cited the example of one Malian citizen in particular who had been in Ouagadougou for about a decade and owned a shop at one the local hotels. Other Malians, he continued, have been in Burkina Faso so long that they have Burkinabe wives and their children are enrolled in local schools. Maiga firmly believed that because of these facts, the Malian Tuaregs did not qualify for refugee status.

The next steps and Embassy Comment

¶8. (SBU) Kodga said the next steps for this displaced population would be completion of investigations on which individuals would qualify for asylum status in Burkina Faso. Following these investigations, which he hoped would end soon, the GOBF would react accordingly, either returning the refugees to Mali or asking them to apply for resident status in Burkina Faso, said Kodga.

¶9. (SBU) Comment: CONAREF seems disgruntled about how UNHCR revealed their ruling on the Tuaregs, which could be the reason they seem to be ignoring the UNHCR findings. It is also possible that CONAREF wants to be cautious in how they treat the Malians, and to complete their due diligence. The GOBF will be able to host the Malian Tuaregs as long as there is enough financial support from donors for their care and feeding.

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